

WRIGHT BROTHERS MASTER PILOT AWARD

Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2006



RAHOI, Urban Eugene. Urban Eugene Rahoi was born January 7, 1919, in Iron City, Michigan. His interest in flying was fostered in high school by his shop teacher who had his students build a low wing, wire braced, monoplane that resembled a Boeing P-26, and Urban thought it really looked sharp. This craft was powered by a Velie 5-cylinder radial engine, but according to Urban, it should have had a 7-cylinder and it would have been a real performer!

Urban started flying in 1934, and soloed that year in a Taylor cub with a 40-horsepower engine. After high school, he got a job working for the Highway Department in Michigan. He studied to be an aircraft mechanic by attending night school. He married Vienna on January 7, 1940, in Iron Mountain, Michigan, and they have three children: Eugene, Holly, and Ricky.

By the time World War II rolled around, he had a commercial pilot license, but was not a college graduate, so he figured he was not

eligible for Army flight training. One day, he noticed a really sharp Army officer walking by with wings who happened to be his old flight instructor and, to his surprise, this fellow said, "Urban, sign up for the flying cadets and flight training; they're taking guys without college now, but don't tell them you already know how to fly!"

Urban signed up and started flying the Stearman and hammed it up pretty good in primary flight training, but his instructor was on to him—he soloed, and was pretty much on his own after that. He graduated Army Flight Training in class 44-C, and was put back as an instructor for six months, with the promise of Bombers and combat. In late 1944, he was a B-17 pilot, and formation-flying instructor in Avon Park, SEEbring, Florida. But, still no combat! Finally in 1945, he flew to North Africa (via Newfoundland and the Ãzores), and then on to Italy where he flew bombing missions over southern Germany. Once again, because of his flying ability, he was tapped to be the check pilot for the group and teach B-17 formation flying to the green bomber crews arriving in Italy. After the hostilities in Europe, B-17's were converted to troop carriers, flying troops away from the former combat areas to staging areas for troop transport home. Urban returned to the United States in 1945, and stayed on as an Air Force reservist after WWII.

In 1947, he flew his Piper Super Cruiser to Alaska. He then flew charters for Interior Airways, for

McGoffin and Al Wright. Urban owned Ray's Air Service and operated an Aeronca Sedan on floats, a Piper Super Cruiser, and a Cessna UC-78 Bobcat to all points in the Interior.

As member of the 449th Fighter Squadron in the Air Force Reserve, Urban flew as command pilot in the C-47, and as second pilot and radar operator on such military classics as the North American F-82 Twin Mustang, the Lockheed F-94 STARfire, and the Northrop F-89 Scorpion. He was never activated during the Korean Conflict—perhaps he was just too eager? He also served as Operations Officer and Range Control Officer at the Blair Lakes Range.

During the 1950's, Urban flew the Norseman for Alaska Airlines, Lavery Air Service, and ERA Mining out of Barrow and Fairbanks. In the 1960's, he flew oil exploration sorties in an Aero Commander for Tom Olsen's Air North. These flying jobs filled in the winter months when his other business interests were slow.

Urban became a big game guide in the Territory of Alaska in 1950. He established a hunting and fishing lodge near the Canadian border on Ptarmigan Lake. The land surrounding the lodge and airstrip had to be negotiated with the Territory of Alaska, who contended that the proposed 4,000-foot runway was not necessary and would significantly alter the terrain. Urban fired back that there were no suitable landing areas in Eastern Alaska for

pilots to have as an alternate, and that his proposed landing strip would serve anyone flying from the Lower 48 to Alaska as an optional landing area. His argument eventually prevailed, and he was granted the easement for the airstrip. When Alaska became a state and licensed the guides, he paid his license fees early and received Alaska State Guide License #1. He still holds this license today, and is active as a guide and lodge owner. His latest Dahl sheep hunt was three years ago near the Canadian border, and his future plans include more adventures afield looking for "the perfect curl" amongst the peaks of the Wrangell Mountains.

Urban maintains that the Cessna 185 is the ideal airplane for flying the Alaskan Bush Country. He has flown the 185 on wheels, skis, and floats for 28 years. Once, on take-off from Ptarmigan Lake, he felt that something was wrong. He continued to Fairbanks and landed at Phillips Field. He exchanged his airplane's engine with an overhauled one, and had the old engine taken apart for analysis. It was found that one of the counter weights had come off the crankshaft and was in the bottom of the engine. This was a close one, as it could have been catastrophic. In 1968, he took off from Lakeview in this turbo-charged Cessna 206, when the turbocharger failed. This degraded the airplane's performance significantly and, it landed just past the opposite shore, cart wheeled, and finally ended upside-down in some tall grass. The payload consisted of two passengers and a load of fresh eggs. Urban and his passengers

escaped through the rear door, but the eggs were scrambled!

During a ferry flight in a Cessna 336, from Alaska to California, on the leg between Watson Lake and Prince George, Urban again felt something was wrong with his airplane. He turned around at Fort Graham to return to Watson Lake, when the rear propeller came apart. One of the departing blades nearly severed the right tail boom, severely crippling the airplane. He thought to himself, “What do I do now?” The airplane began a shallow descent and he knew he was landing whether he wanted to or not. Fortunately, a 1200-foot landing strip appeared ahead in a valley on his glidepath. He arrived over the strip and flared for touchdown, but the tail boom failed leaving him with no pitch control. The nose dropped, and the airplane ricocheted three times before it came to a stop in soft sand and, as always, there are tourists with cameras, even when you don’t know where you are. One tourist promised to send a picture of the wreckage, which he never received. This propeller failure had happened to eight Cessna 336’s, and Urban was the only pilot to live through the experience. He said he remained calm throughout the incident with the philosophy that he would just fly it down, and think of how to get it on the ground. Once again, his philosophy that you should never let loose of the airplane through anything, had paid off. He also felt that he had some “Divine Guidance” on this one, which is why he lived to tell the tale another day.

At age 87, Urban still flies over 100 hours a year to supply his lodge. He hauls supplies to Beaver Creek in Canada, and ferries them to Ptarmigan Lake in his Cessna 182. The very helpful, and well-meaning Canadian Mountie stationed at Beaver Creek asked him recently if he needed help loading the airplane. Urban replied, “If you help me, I’ll get soft. How do you expect me to continue doing this by myself, if I get soft”?

Urban’s contribution to aviation has spanned 70 years. He has used his skill as an aviator to train airmen, fight a war, and maintain the safety standard in commercial aviation. He has rescued people in trouble and supplied people in the bush with the necessities of life. He has contributed to the State of Alaska, and provided many people a chance to see the wild and beautiful Alaska we all love. A final thought for us here tonight is his recipe for a long and happy life, “The only person who can make you happy, is you.”